



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

LYC NENND

4/30/82

November 25, 1977

Dear Mr. Scavo:

This is in belated answer to your letter of August 26 to Secretary Vance which addressed the problem encountered by American merchant masters who pick up Indochina refugees in distress on the high seas in Southeast Asia. For some time we have been aware that these masters have experienced difficulty in administratively disembarking rescued refugees at ports of call in Southeast Asia, and thus we share your concern that such difficulties could lead some masters to hesitate to pick up Indochinese refugee boats flying distress signals.

Disembarking the refugees at a nearby port of call at minimum inconvenience to the rescuing vessel, in some instances, requires that the country of debarkation have an assurance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that the refugees will be permanently accepted elsewhere. Countries in the South East Asia area have adopted this general policy to avoid assuming permanent responsibility for the Indochinese refugees, since the number of refugees fleeing from Vietnam continues to increase.

The United States has taken steps to improve the receptivity of Southeast and East Asian countries to provide temporary safehaven for refugees by accepting 7,000 boat cases for parole into the United States. This parole program will eliminate the backlog

Mr. Frank T. Scavo,
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that had built up through the summer of 1977 in the countries of that region. Although authority to admit currently escaping Indochinese refugees is very limited, we are seeking continuing authority to accept boat refugees who have no other offer of resettlement.

We are not yet in a position to guarantee to the American ship master that the United States will invariably be able to accept promptly each refugee he has picked up. However, the probability in any given case is high that a UNHCR guarantee can be obtained which will permit the refugees to be disembarked at a nearby port of call.

We hope that you will bring these developments to the attention of American merchant vessel masters who sail in this area of the world. You may wish to remind them that after a vessel has picked up refugees in distress on the high seas the UNHCR representative and U.S. consul at the next port of call should be contacted for assistance in disembarking the refugees.

Please let us know if you feel there are other constructive steps we can take to ensure that no American vessel overlooks a refugee boat in distress. Thank you for your interest in this humanitarian problem. We will keep you informed of any significant new developments.

Sincerely,

Patricia M. Derian
Assistant Secretary for
Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs